

Blues hit top form as Enfield crumble

ENFIELD came to Loakes Park on Saturday as clear leaders of the Rothmans Isthmian League. Three hours later they left a well beaten side, having been exposed by the current champions Wycombe Wanderers, who produced by far their best performance of the season.

For much of this season, Wycombe have been struggling. On Saturday, they cast that early form aside and turned on a fine display. The Blues rose to occasion of playing against the Division One leaders, who it has to be said, were an extremely disappointing side on the day.

And let's get one thing straight from the start. A 2-1 scoreline can conjure up ideas of a close game. Enfield's goal was a free gift in the last minute of the match and by then they had long given up the ghost and were demoralised by Wycombe's skill, guts and work rate.

So just why did Wanderers choose to click on this one occasion? The big match atmosphere must have helped as did the fans. But the main reason was a marked improvement up front. From the opening whistle Tony Horsemann, Dylan Evans and Geoff Anthony constantly worried Enfield's normally steady defence and their anxiety spread throughout the team.

Evans had a particularly good game. For along time, Dylan had been much maligned for his inconsistency. On Saturday he was full of speed and ability and capped it all with by far the best goal seen at Loakes Park this season — a cracking shot from 25 yards.

With the front men able to hold the ball and find each other regularly, much of the usual stress and worry was taken off the midfield three, who benefited accordingly. They deserve credit too for winning much of the possession and constantly harassing their counterparts. The defence, as it has been for most of the season, looked sound and John Maskell in goal had few worries.

All this added up to an excellent team performance. The more they played, the better they became and the way the

Wycombe Wanderers 2, Enfield 1 REPORT by STUART EARP

confidence started flooding back after the goals was almost visible. It was only the second time the Blues had scored twice in a match this season and they certainly made the most of it. There is a feeling now at Loakes Park that Wanderers can use the game as a stepping stone for better things in the future. The players must certainly be pleased with the way things went and there seems no reason why they should not continue to improve with this prestige triumph under their belts.

There was plenty of interest in this champions v leaders game. Keith Searle returned for the first time to his former club and had a quiet 90 minutes. He snapped up the goal at the end but one couldn't help feeling a little sorry for him. He had almost no support all afternoon and his colleagues didn't seem to appreciate the talents of a man who has 10 goals already this term. That was Enfield's main failing. They have the best squad man for man in the league. The trouble is, they are all individuals and manager Ted Hardy has not yet found the right blend.

Wanderers had Dave Alexander back in midfield and he certainly made the most of his chance. It was Alex in fact who combined with Anthony to set up their first chance after eight minutes which Horsemann, looking for that 500th goal, headed just over the crossbar. Even at this stage Wanderers were looking good. Their passing was accurate and they supported well with both full backs overlapping.

The pressure was soon having an effect on Enfield. Their defence hacked clear on many occasions and this poor distribution made life difficult for the midfield and front players.

There was only one thing missing from the Blues style — someone to stick the ball in the net. Often they approached dangerously with two or three passes cutting through the defence only for the move to break down at the last minute.

Enfield had their moments in

attack and Maskell saved well from former Wanderer Peter McGillicuddy in the 26th minute. McGillicuddy was well outside the box when he placed a firm drive towards the corner but Maskell parried well. Then seven minutes later Derek Baker sneaked through on the blind side of the defence onto Fred Callaghan's free kick. Once again Maskell saved, taking the ball under his arm as he fell to the turf.

Wanderers were quick to retaliate. Mick Holifield, who always seems the most likely man to make the breakthrough, left the defence stranded with a characteristic burst, but rammed the shot just past the far post. Then before half-time he saw another effort hit a defender, lob over 'keeper Willie Carrick and land on top of the net.

But throughout this first half, things had been strangely quiet. The swirling wind certainly didn't help and the game itself lacked pace. At the interval, more goalmouth action seemed to be needed to generate interest.

Enfield provided it with 30 seconds of the restart. John Delaney, back in place of Dave Bullock, almost back-headed into his own net as the ball was caught by the wind, Maskell pushing it away for a corner and then Brooks found himself unmarked from Micky O'Sullivan's cross but was so surprised, he miscued his volley with just Maskell to beat.

After those two close shaves, Wanderers got their game together again. Holifield cracked a vicious drive over the top and then Evans put in a brilliant run down the wing. He skipped over Brian Wilson's lunge and crossed perfectly into the box where Holifield side footed just too high.

In the 64th minute Wycombe broke the deadlock. From a corner on the top wing, the ball came to Evans who drilled a shot towards the net. The ball struck one of the three defenders on the line and came out to Keith Mead. Faced with this situation, many players

would have lashed out wildly in the hope that power would take the ball through the massed defence. Not Mead. He weighed up the situation and carefully side-footed the ball through a minute gap and into the back of the net. Keith's goal was a tribute to his excellent display at centre-back and also to Wycombe's perseverance in front of goal.

The game was far from over but from this moment Wycombe got better and better. Then Evans scored his glorious goal in the 73rd minute. He needed very little help from his teammates as he controlled the ball 25 yards out. It bounced once and as the ball came down again, Dylan turned and crashed a thrilling shot past the airborne Carrick. It was still on the up when it bulged the back of the net.

Both sides brought on their substitutes soon afterwards but the second goal seemed like a nail in Enfield's coffin and they were powerless to stop Wanderers surging forward in search of a £40 bonus.

In the last five minutes there were two moments of danger for Wycombe — one of which resulted in a goal. Brooks crossed in the 87th minute but both Baker and Les Eason missed their shots and then with 60 seconds left, Searle grabbed his free gift. Ray Eaton took a throw-in near his own penalty area and threw back to Maskell. He didn't spot Searle lurking nearby, however. Keith nipped in and intercepted and although Maskell half held the ball, Searle regained possession and rolled the ball home from a difficult angle.

The set-back put a damper on Wycombe's show to a small degree, but nothing could take it away from them on Saturday. They were the better side without doubt and thoroughly deserved this triumph.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, J. Delaney, R. Eaton; D. Alexander, T. Reardon, M. Holifield; A. Horsemann, D. Evans, G. Anthony (sub. H. Kennedy 75 mins.).

ENFIELD: W. Carrick; D. Lawrence, P. Fry, B. Wilson, F. Callaghan; J. Tone, M. O'Sullivan, D. Baker; P. McGillicuddy (sub. L. Eason 74 mins.), K. Searle, D. Brooks.

Referee: J. Martin (Selsdon).
Half-time: 0-0. Goalscorers: Wycombe — Mead (64), Evans (73). Enfield — Searle (89).
Official paying attendance: 1,589.
Approx. total attendance: 1,900.